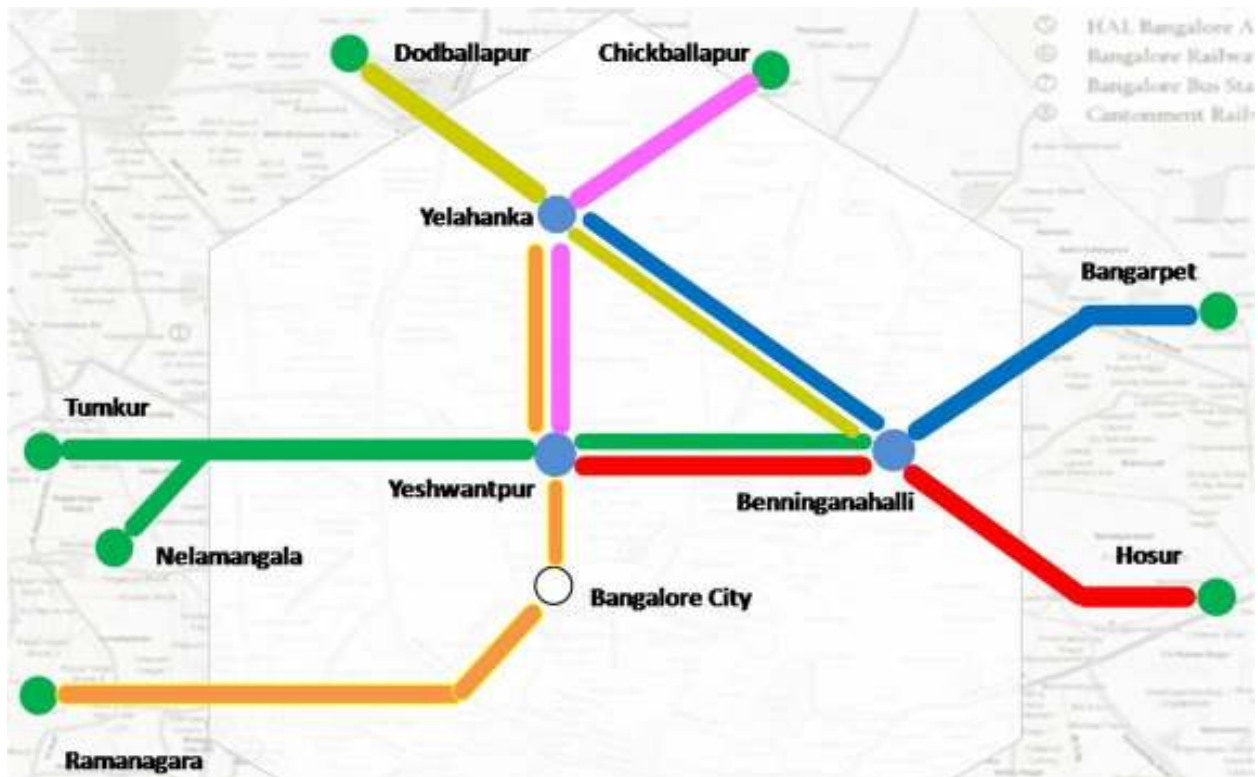


## Press Release: Public Discussion on Commuter Rail System for Bangalore

A public discussion was held on Sunday, 15<sup>th</sup> July, at SCM Hall, Mission Road to discuss and understand the potential of a commuter rail system (CRS) for Bangalore. The discussion was organized by ITEC, an IT employees collective, Praja (a citizen group working on urban issues), Hasiru Usiru, a collective of people and organizations working on urban mobility and commons, Concern (IISc), an IISc students group and AID India.

Prof Sitaram, Chairman CISTUP spoke about how solutions like Road widening and signal free corridors are all focused on vehicles and not people. He said that with ever increasing number of vehicles in the city, these measures fall short of addressing the city's mobility needs. He also said that solutions like Metro will cater only to certain segments of the society and has a high cost and cannot be expected to cover large parts of the city.

Sanjeev from Praja spoke about the advocacy efforts from Praja to push for a CRS in Bangalore. The existing rail network extensively covers the Northern, Eastern and Western parts of the city and even some parts of the South. The existing network connecting heavy traffic corridors like Hosur Road, Whitefield-ITPL segment, industrial areas like Peenya, Doddballapur, Bidadi etc. Many of these corridors also have many colleges, prominent hospitals etc. along its alignment.



A technical feasibility report on CRS was recently commissioned by Directorate of Urban Land Transport and carried out by RITES. As per this report, with an investment of 8000 Crores and 25 trains per direction across a network of 405 kms, commuter rail can carry 2 million passengers per day. Compare

this with the investment of 12000 crores in Metro for a 42 km track with an estimated carrying capacity of 1 million and one can clearly see the advantages of a commuter rail network.

Dr. Sudhira, an urban transport and land-use expert, called the Bangalore transport scenario a “tragedy of commons” where the lack of adequate public provision has resulted in private solutions at high costs to the city, its people and its commons. He said that while CRS will definitely increase the urban sprawl, it still has many advantages and that it’s a solution that needs to be pursued. He said policy initiatives like paid parking and congestion pricing should also be pursued to encourage a mobility shift to CRS. He also said that adequate planning should be done to address the regional growth that CRS will spur.

There was a vibrant discussion among the participants on various aspects of CRS covering the technical details, planning, policy and execution. Mr. Chopra, a retired business man and a railway enthusiast, criticized the RITES report for targeting the Binny Mill land and said that a lot can be done even with the existing capacity and on land that’s already available with Railways. The participants talked about how CRS can reduce pollution, bring down the high rate of road accidents and meet the needs of a wide cross section of people including vendors and small traders, students, industrial workers and IT employees.

One of the challenges in implementation of CRS is that Railways come under the central government. RITES report says that Railways, being under severe financial crunch, may be unable to fund the project. The report recommends joint funding by GoK and GoI. The participants at the meeting discussed how it’s important to have affordable fare structures and for CRS to be driven by public needs as opposed to commercial/profitability concerns.

The meeting also highlighted the need for transparent and inclusive institutional arrangements for planning and implementation of CRS. It stressed that the local planning authorities, like Ramnagaram, Anekal, Nelamangala, Magadi , Hoskote, Kanakpura, which fall under the CRS network, should be involved in the process of decision making. The organizing groups have decided to take up awareness campaigns about CRS among various user segments and regions.

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